

BILLINGS, MONT.
GAZETTE

MAY 4 1971
M - 42,441
S - 54,232

Hardware in space

The frequent incursions into space these days are leaving the man on the street somewhat less than impressed.

He seems to be taking them in stride with matter-of-fact acceptance.

The momentary exhilaration of Alan Shepard in his celestial play-suit setting foot on the moon was gone when all was found to be safe—as expected. Apollo 14 was a success. So what else is new? Joe Public sighed.

Nobody much but headline writers got excited last month when the Russians thrust Makhina into Earth orbit and sent three astronauts on a visit. Little excitement resulted when the Soviets made a soft landing and reported with awe on what they had seen up there.

The same was true in Russia where the Soviet leadership took great pride and propaganda opportunity in the fact it had launched a space platform with its awesome potential.

Comrad Ivan did not even turn on his television set. He did complain that he was only making X number of rubles when “they” were wasting millions in the sky.

The man-on-the-street tone was familiar in Moscow, New York and Billings.

Not so in Washington and the Kremlin. The men in charge there know the military value of space stations.

The men in Washington, D.C., know that our own version of what we think Makhina to be—a Skylab—won’t be thrust into space until late in 1972.

The goal by target date 1978 is a huge station with enough room for several dozen astronauts shuttling to and from the Earth.

What will they be doing up there? The National Aeronautics and Space Agency is talking about surveys to find hidden metal deposits in the Earth and studies to improve agriculture, fisheries and pollution control.

That’s the talk and probably true insofar as it goes.

There is reason to believe the major importance of the Skylab is military to both the U.S.A. and Russia. Space platforms or stations can be used to launch missiles. Satellites already up there outmode various forms of conventional espionage.

Given a two-hour peek via satellite, today’s sophisticated equipment will tell the CIA more than it can learn in a year from a dozen agents inside on the ground.

The list of military-defense uses grows. Perhaps the entire cost should be billed to the military with credit for civilian aid spinoff.

Either way, the Russian advances with Makhina make it more evident our space program should continue.